

# THE NIZAMI MS.

ILLUMINATED BY

BIHZAD, MIRAK AND QASIM ALI

WRITTEN 1495 FOR SULTAN ALI MIRZA BARLĀS  
RULER OF SAMARQAND

IN THE

BRITISH MUSEUM (OR. 6810)

BY

F. R. MARTIN

AND

SIR THOMAS ARNOLD

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I OFTEN thought that the best, or rather, only way to settle the much discussed question if very minute Persian miniatures were by the master, by pupils or imitators, was to enlarge them 3 or 4 times by photographic process. I have not yet been able to experiment on it with miniatures. But when I found that the paper a scribe presented to the Sultan on the first page of this manuscript had an inscription which was not readable, even with a magnifying glass, I had the inscription enlarged several times, and Sir Thomas Arnold was able to read it. He found that the MS. was presented to Sultan Ali Mirza Barlās,<sup>1</sup> a descendant of the third son of Timur, Mirānshāh.

His father, Sultan Mahmud Mirza Barlās, who died in 900, was a ruler of Samarqand for a very short time, only five or six months. His son occupied the town for a short time in 901 as a result of a rebellion against his half-brother Baisunghar Mirza, but Baisunghar soon recovered it and held it until Barlās took it 903 (1497). Sultan Ali Mirza appears to have got possession of the town once more, for we know that he surrendered it 906 (1500) to the Uzbegh Khan Shaybani who had Ali Mirza put to death a few days later. How cruel these people were!

These first two pages, which may be considered as a sort of frontispiece, would seem to be of an earlier date than the manuscript, but now that Sir Thomas Arnold has found out the name of Sultan Barlās, there is no question of their not originally belonging to the book. They are the most important in the manuscript and stand perhaps alone in the Timurid art.

There are few leaves of such beauty in the whole Persian art. They have something of a beauty of Benozzo Gozzoli, and could very well be copied or inspired by wall-hangings embroidered on goldstuff or frescoes on golden ground. That goldground gives them a richness as if they were Byzantine gold enamels. The landscape points to Samargand or Turkistan. The carpets seem to be early carpets from Merv or made by the nomadic tribes between Turkistan and Afghanistan. All the personages on these leaves seem to be portraits of the courtiers of the Sultan. To identify the portraits on Persian miniatures will be one of the most interesting tasks the Orient has to offer to students, but also one of the most difficult. Each portrait identified is a foundation-stone, a step forward in our knowledge about the East.

Plate 7, representing a public bath, is a rare and curious scene. The artist has given it a certain charm by letting the blue bathcloths dominate, the whole picture is harmony in blue.

The father of Khusrau sitting on his throne, Plate 8, seems to have got the likeness of Timur, who very often is represented in such a position to avoid showing that his leg was short or lame. It may have been a compliment by Bihzad to his descendant, the Sultan Ali Mirza Barlās.

Plates 9 and 10 are remarkable for the carpets, probably old Merv carpets. I wonder if Shirin is not also a portrait of one of the dead wives of a Sultan. A living Sultana the painter would not have dared to represent. It seems as if both miniatures were by Mirak, anyhow they are in the old academic style. The inscription over the arch on Plate 10 is very important, because it confirms that the manuscript was



made for the library of Amir Ali Fārsi Barlās. Was the Sultan born in Fars or did he exercise authority there? Plate 9 is remarkable for the decoration of the walls of an amazing minuteness; especially the rose coloured wall with white arabesques is a very rarely seen motive.

Plate 13 is certainly a copy after Bihzad, but it is signed Qasim Ali. The following seven Plates are less remarkable. Similar miniatures by Bihzad or his pupils still exist.

Plate 21 is a proof that Qasim Ali was a copyist, if the almost scratched out signature is really his, the style of the miniature differing from his other signed work. It is much more academic, more Mirak. I wonder if Qasim Ali did not hide his signature in the text, because he was afraid of being improved by his Master who generally signed in a very hidden place on the miniature itself. He was certainly not allowed to put his name on the miniatures; as Bihzad had not worked on the pictures himself, probably only given the sketch, he did not like to sign them. Qasim Ali was anxious to go to posterity and give an Armenian bey an opportunity to make a sensational discovery.<sup>2</sup>

Plate 22. The artist seems to have given his Iskandar the face of Sultan Mirza Husain Baykara. Even here most of the personages seem to be portraits; the two kneeling figures are certainly foreign princes waiting for audience. But who are they? Plate 22 is important, because it bears the date 900 (1494-5).

On Plate 23 we again find Husain Baykara sitting in the boat. Who is the prince on the right side of the idol? Husain Baykara? Who the two sages on the left?

Plate 24 again represents Sultan Husain Baykara copied by Qasim Ali, after the sketch<sup>3</sup> of Bihzad, so well known from the Bellini-Album.

If we now examine these miniatures more closely, we shall find that the attributions to Bihzad and Mirak are written in good old (perhaps contemporary) calligraphy on all those miniatures which have not got the signature of Qasim Ali, and that on all those which are signed by Qasim Ali, the name Bihzad is written in a quite inexperienced hand. This suggests the possibility that Bihzad left it to a pupil to finish the book. What may be signatures of Qasim Ali are so scratched out, that it is not at all certain that they really are his signature. As the miniatures signed by Qasim Ali are at the end of the volume, it is more than likely that he had to finish them after the sketches of Bihzad.

All the miniatures in the manuscript have been pasted in. They were painted on separate leaves and I am uncertain whether the calligrapher had to fill in his text before the miniatures were made or afterwards.

If Qasim Ali was such a great artist, greater than Bihzad, why has he not during the last four hundred years in the whole of the East found a better man to sing his praises than an Armenian amateur? The only old writer who says a few words about him is the political historian Khwandamir, who says that Qasim Ali was a portraitist of great ability. I really do not think we can call these miniatures, the only work of his hand that is known, portraits.

The question about the authenticity of the signatures of Bihzad and Mirak will take a great step forward towards its solution through the publication of historical manuscripts belonging to an English collector, the fortunate owner of many treasures, amongst others a little sketch-book that once belonged to Bihzad.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The *Bārbur-nāmā*, translated by Annette S. Beveridge, London 1921, gives an account of his life. See Index under Ali Mirza Mirānshāh.

<sup>2</sup> An Armenian dilettante published in 1920 in the "Gazette des Beaux Arts" a rather confusing article which was meant to provoke a revolution in our ideas about Persian painting. It was called "Les miniaturistes persans Rassim Ali et Behzad." He says that he had been lucky to discover, after a very careful examination of this MS., the hitherto unknown signature of Rassim Ali, although it was no doubt Qasim Ali. These signatures everybody, except him, had known a long time. He also reproached me for not having taken any notice of such an important artist, perhaps greater than Bihzad. If he had cared to look up page 113 in my book about Oriental Miniatures, he would not have proclaimed his discovery without risking to be called a plagiarist. Rassim Ali is and will always be the glory of Armenian art critics.

<sup>3</sup> F. R. Martin, *Miniature Painting and Painters*, Pl. 81.

## LIST OF PLATES

- PLATES 1 and 2. The manuscript being presented to Sultan Ali Mirza Barlās, ruler of Samarqand.
- PLATES 3 and 4. Title pages.
- PLATE 5 (fol. 5 v). Muhammad on Buraq passing over the Ka'bah at Mecca.
- PLATE 6 (fol. 16 r). Sultan Sanjar and the old woman. Mirak.
- PLATE 7 (fol. 27 v). Scene in a public bath. Bihzad.
- PLATE 8 (fol. 37 v). The elders pleading with the father of Khusrau to forgive his son. Bihzad.
- PLATE 9 (fol. 39 v). Shirin receives the portrait of Khusrau. Mirak?
- PLATE 10 (fol. 62 v). Farhad being brought to the palace of Shirin. Mirak. With an inscription that the MS. was made for library of Amir Ali Fārsi Barlās.
- PLATE 11 (fol. 72 v). Death of Farhad on hearing a false report of the death of Shirin. Bihzad.
- PLATE 12 (fol. 93 r). Murder of Khusrau by Shiruya. Bihzad.
- PLATE 13 (fol. 106 v). Layla and Majnun at school. Signed by Qasim Ali.
- PLATE 14 (fol. 128 v). Visit of Salim the uncle of Layla to Majnun in the desert. Bihzad.
- PLATE 15 (fol. 135 v). Mourning for the death of Layla's husband. Bihzad.
- PLATE 16 (fol. 137 r). Layla and Majnun in a swoon. Bihzad.

PLATE 17 (fol. 144 v). Death of Majnun on the grave of Layla. Signed by Qasim Ali.

PLATE 18 (fol. 154 v). The building of the citadel of Khawarnaq for king Nu'man. Bihzad.

PLATE 19 (fol. 157). Bahram Gur slaying the dragon. Signed by Qasim Ali but the signature is scratched out.

PLATE 20 (fol. 175 r). Bashr feeling with the branch of a tree for the body of his drowned companion. Signed by Qasim Ali.

PLATE 21 (fol. 190 r). The owner of the garden finds ladies bathing in its waters. Signature of Qasim Ali scratched out.

PLATE 22 (fol. 214 r). Iskandar discoursing with the seven sages. Probably by Qasim Ali. Dated 900 (= 1494-5 A.D.). Husain Baykara is represented as Iskandar.

PLATE 23 (fol. 225 v). Iskandar at the idol temple of Qandahar. Husain Baykara sitting in the boat.

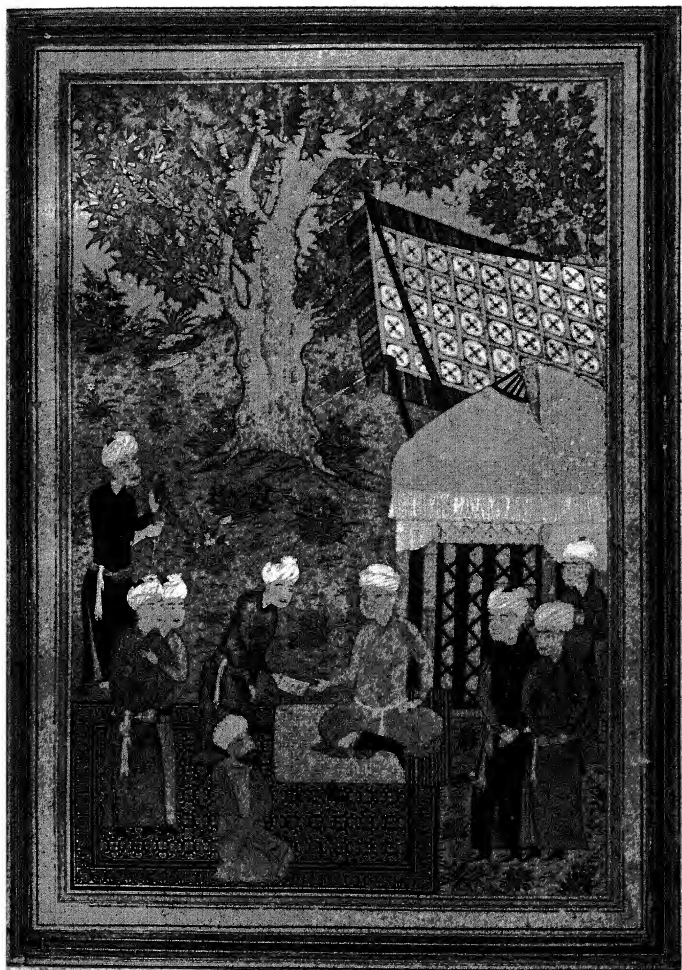
PLATE 24 (fol. 233 v). Iskandar visiting a hermit. Iskandar is represented by Husain Baykara. Signed by Qasim Ali.





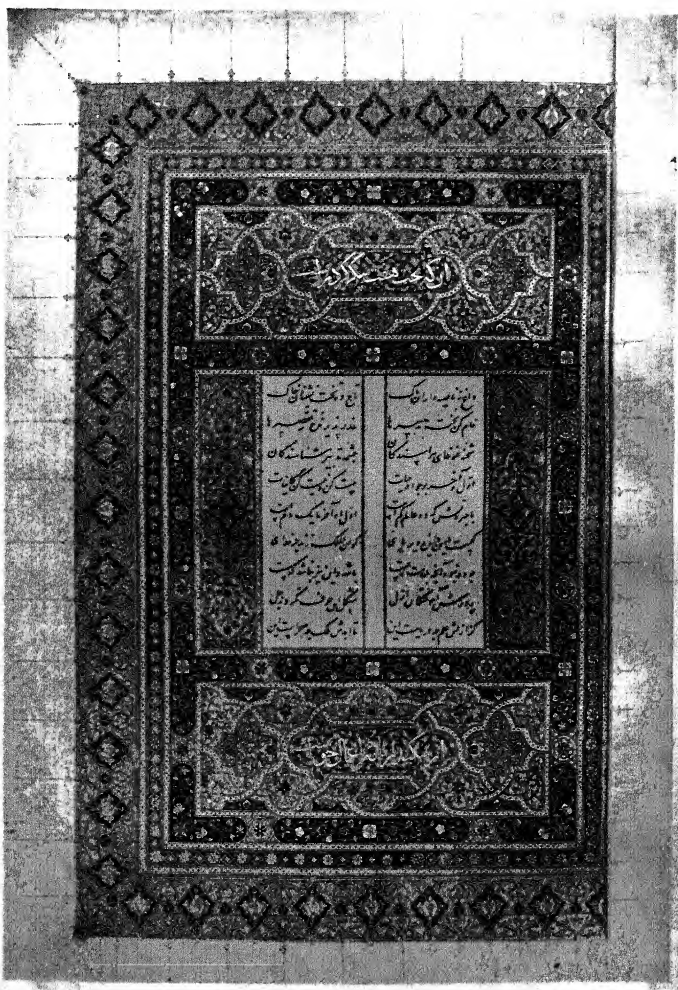


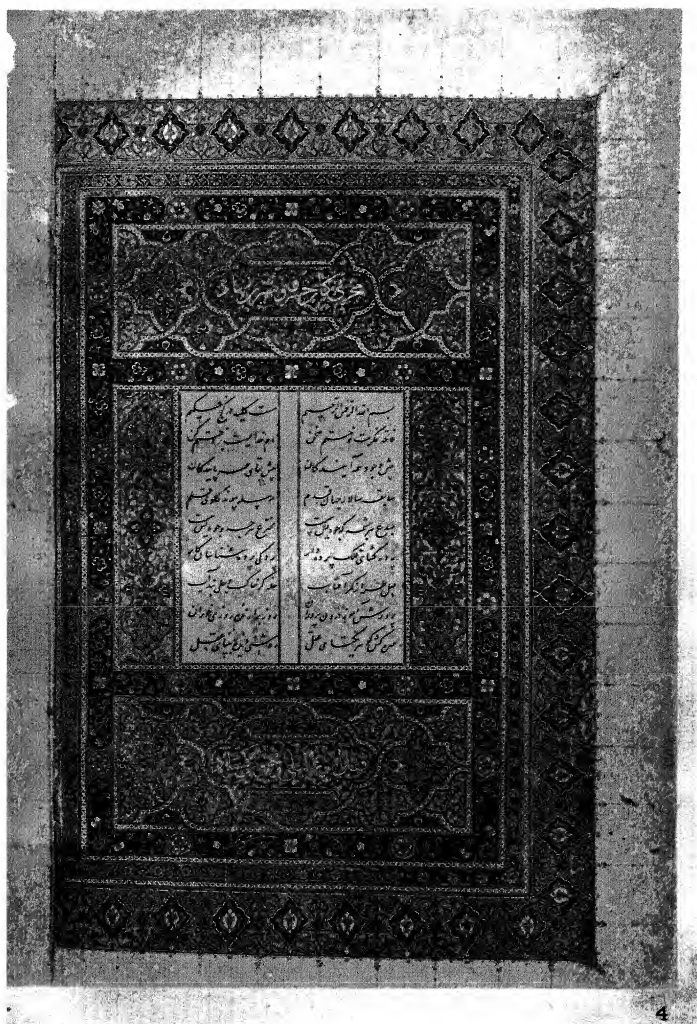
















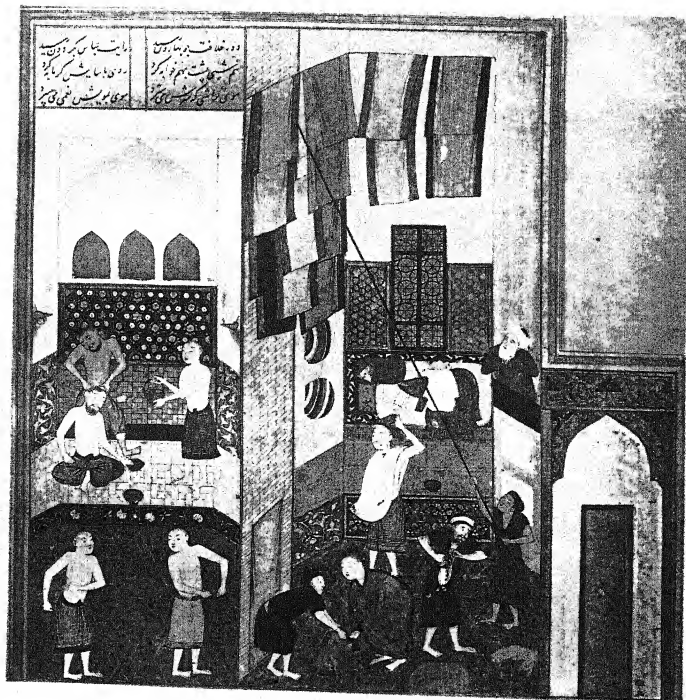




<p>تو بهیچ نیکو که دست کار تا بخواری تیر حسی که شای تا بهیچ نیکو که دست کار تا بخواری تیر حسی که شای</p>	<p>سخت بند بر نفس من عیار تا بهیچ نیکو که دست کار تا بخواری تیر حسی که شای تا بهیچ نیکو که دست کار</p>	<p>باین سید و بر من تاجدار تا بهیچ نیکو که دست کار تا بخواری تیر حسی که شای تا بهیچ نیکو که دست کار</p>	<p>تو بهیچ نیکو که دست کار تا بخواری تیر حسی که شای تا بهیچ نیکو که دست کار تا بخواری تیر حسی که شای</p>
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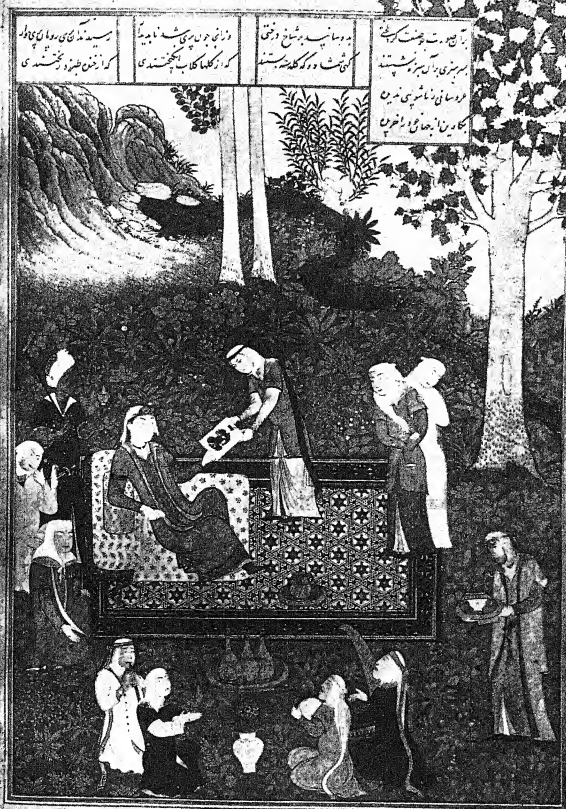






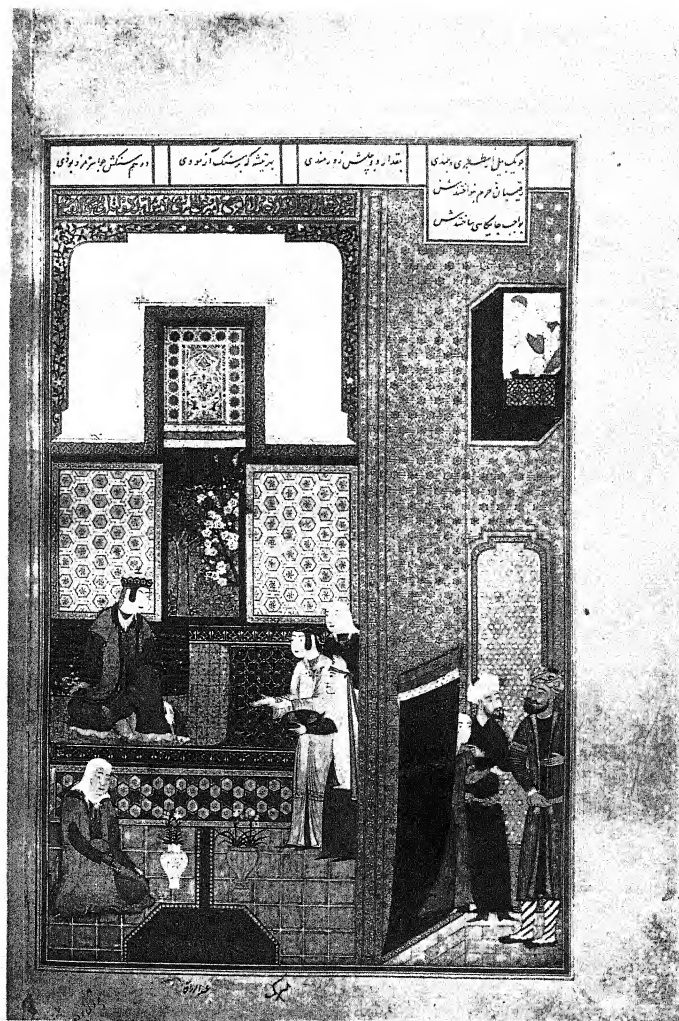




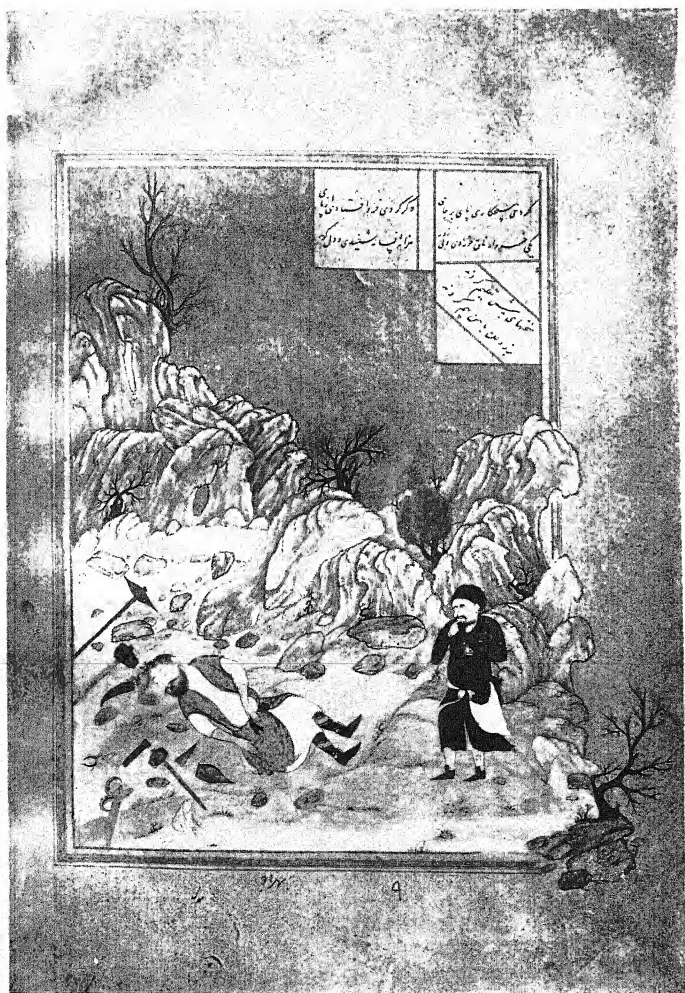








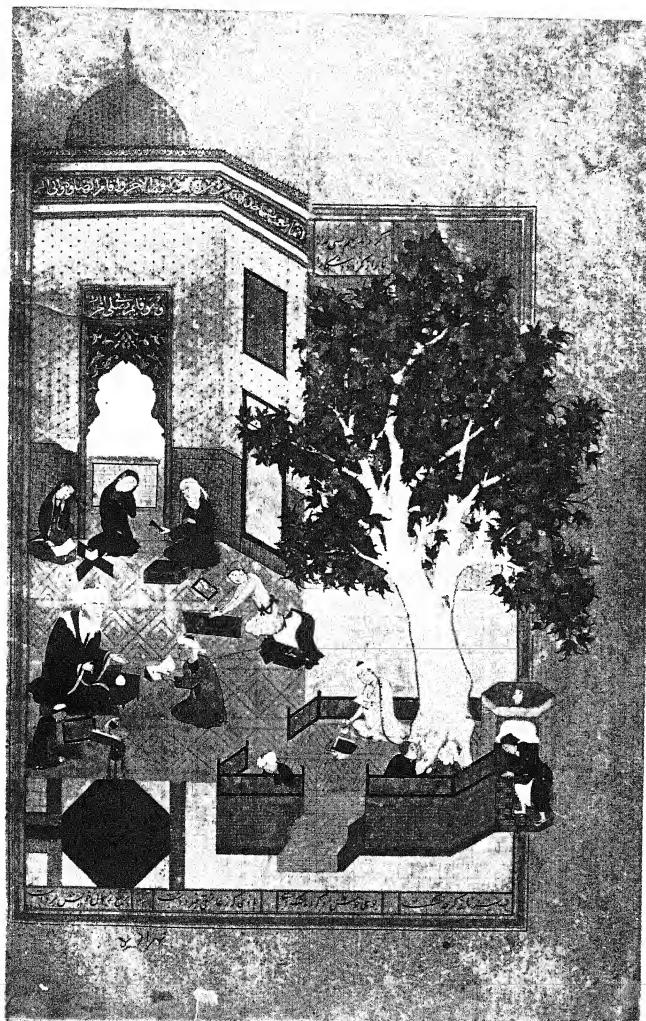










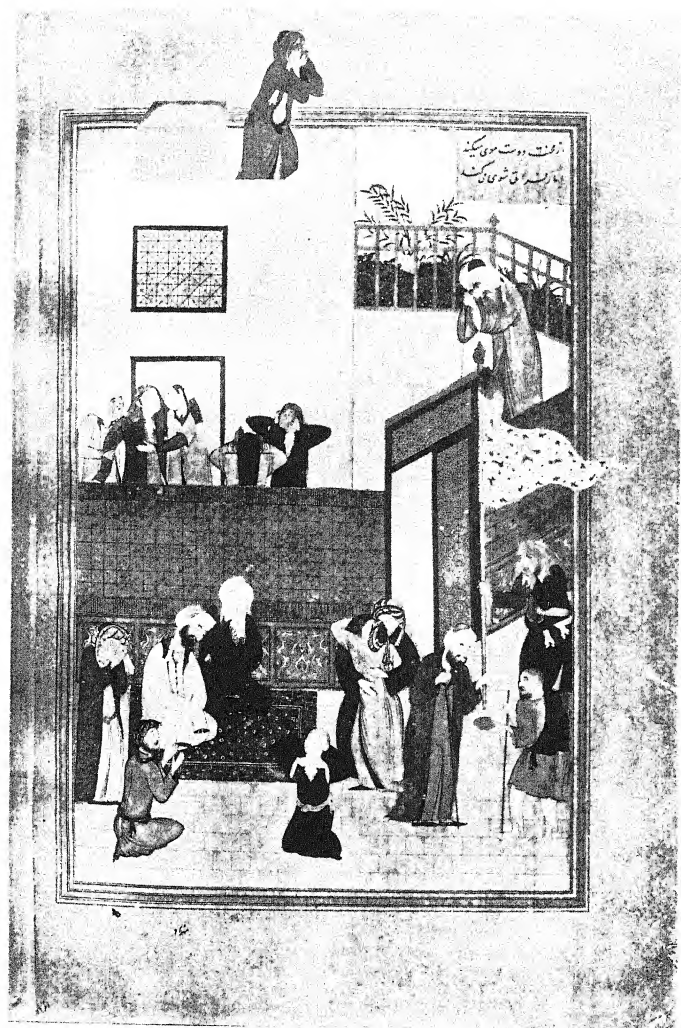
















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